

Testimony

Government Administration and Elections Committee
March 1, 2010
Improve H.B.5321

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Chairs and members of the Committee, my name is Luther Weeks. I am Executive Director of Connecticut Voters Count. I am also a Certified Moderator and served in the last election as a central count absentee ballot moderator

I support the good intentions and concepts behind H.B.5321, yet I have serious concerns with the specific approaches in the current bill.

I am generally opposed to the expansion of absentee balloting for any purpose. Absentee ballots have security and integrity risks not associated with regular voting. Election day registration may represent over 10% of the votes in an election. Beyond risks to integrity, in every election absentee voters are disenfranchised without their knowledge in two ways:

- First, they may make a simple mistake in following procedures and have their ballot rejected.
- Second, voters do not have the opportunity to revote their ballot if by mistake they overvote.

It would serve the voters of Connecticut much better if Election Day Registration (or EDR) were available at each polling place as is the case in five (5) of the six (6) states with EDR as of 2006. Connecticut could follow the examples of Maine, New Hampshire, or Minnesota. We are piloting a less than adequate system, I presume because of concerns with cost and integrity. I recall testimony before the GAE demonstrating the integrity and effectiveness of polling place EDR in Maine.

I would also recommend that any pilot program include a requirement for independent objective analysis with reporting back to the Legislature, rather than relying only on feedback from election officials. When Secretary Bysiewicz chose new election equipment in 2006, she included an independent professional analysis involving citizen evaluation, along with focus groups of citizens and election officials. Without that study we might well have doubled our costs and be voting today on inadequate touch screen voting equipment.

There are several ways in which polling place EDR could be accomplished. Any EDR method will increase some election day costs, yet there would also be savings in other election day and pre-election day costs.

Major improvements to the bill would include:

- Requiring voting booths, a ballot box tender, and ballot clerks in central EDR locations to provide the opportunity for a smooth, secure voting process, along with a clear opportunity for voters to correct errors on their ballot.
- Allowing single polling place towns to provide EDR in the same building as the polling place, with voters voting by optical scanner as usual.
- Requiring towns with central count absentee ballot locations to use an optical scanner for EDR ballots, rather than the using the "absentee ballot" like process.

In summary, the focus should be on enfranchising voters and encouraging participation, while maintaining voting integrity

Thank you.

Testimony, Government Administration and Elections Committee, March 1, 2010
Luther Weeks

Additional Information

Pew Report: February 1, 2007: *Election Day Registration: A Case Study*

<http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/Election%20Reform%20Briefing%2016;%20Election-Day%20Registration%20A%20Case%20Study.pdf>

Minnesota, which has offered polling-place EDR for more than 30 years, has recorded between 10 and 20 percent of voters registering and casting ballots on Election Day... Over the past 30 years, the number of Election Day registrants has remained fairly steady, with approximately 13 percent of voters registering to vote on Election Day during off-year elections, and nearly 19 percent during Presidential elections.

Montana rolled out EDR – termed “late registration” – for the first time in the 2006 election with mixed success... Montana’s version of EDR is slightly more restrictive than what is offered in other states. While voters can register and vote in the period between the 30-day cut-off for regular registration and the time the polls close on Election Day, they must do so at a county elections office. The other six states offering EDR allow voters to register and vote at their precinct or at a central location.

According to its Web site, Maine has one of the most accessible voting processes in the country. Voters who do not complete their voter registration form at least 20 days prior to an election may register to vote in person through and including on Election Day. Voters wishing to register in person must show proof of identity and residency.

Luther Weeks: Testimony in 2009:

Election Day Registration in Connecticut

- **Conditionally For*:** Voter Registration today in Connecticut involves reasonable checking of eligibility – equally reliable checks can be performed quickly and equally reliably on election day. Extra It would encourage more legitimate voters and avoid all the potential for erroneous disenfranchisement. Our support is conditional upon effective law and implementation. Added expense and effort by election officials would be offset by the savings of avoiding presidential ballots and many provisional ballots.

Early Voting, Mail-In Voting, and Unlimited/No Excuse Absentee Voting

- **Conditionally Against*:** Significant numbers of absentee voters are disenfranchised in every election by rejection of their ballots – usually for good reason, but they are disenfranchised and their intentions are not realized. These methods in general have security and secrecy challenges, invite fraud, error, and disenfranchisement. We also note in these tough economic times that early voting can be a significant expense, especially in New England with town administered voting.

<http://www.ctvoterscount.org/CTVCdata/09/01/ECM20090128.mht>

<http://www.ctvoterscount.org/?p=1141>

<http://www.ctvoterscount.org/?p=194>